

EARTHLY PROSPERITY AND GOSPEL PROGRESS.

We have been interested in the leading editorial in a recent "Westminster." It sets us to thinking.

It first portrays the material prosperity of our country this year, "big crops, factories on full time, prices up." Then it argues that "great possessions are an indubitable mark of the divine favor," and should eventuate in spiritual development. It says:

"The churches join in the chorus of thanksgiving. Once upon a time the preachers had much to say of 'the uses of adversity,' but we are beyond all that, especially since the budget for the conversion of the heathen has become so big.

"For ourselves, individually, do we feel increasingly pious as we find that we can not pay our debts? And since we are in this mood with every one else, why should the notion that the world is 'a desert drear' excite special faith in its Creator as the source of all good?"

It argues that in the days of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and David, "it was the wicked man who was short of provisions, while the good rode on camels and had all the luxuries of the season."

Is this position true?

I. Does the Bible teach that earthly prosperity indicates God's favor or that earthly trials express God's condemnation?

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he who had wealth went to hell; but the beggar was carried to a place at the heavenly feast "in Abraham's bosom."

In the book of Job, Eliphaz argued that the afflictions of Job proved him to be an awful sinner. Job replied, No! "my righteousness—my redemption—is in it." In the last chapter of Job God condemns the utterances of Eliphaz and declares that Job had spoken "that which is right."

"That model manipulator of the visible supply of corn, Joseph," did indeed enjoy the testimony that "God was with Joseph"; but,—mark you,—this testimony was given not in the years of Joseph's prosperity, but during his slavery and imprisonment.

And in the third chapter of Revelation we read of the church at Laodicea, "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods," therefore "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

One of the wealthiest lands of this earth in ages past was Babylon—but it rests under God's curse: another of great wealth was Egypt—God has made it a "vile kingdom"; and there was Tyre—by prophecy God stripped it and made it a bare rock. Prosperity is not an evidence of God's approval.

II. On the other hand those men for whom God had in store the highest marks of his heavenly approval have been those who spent a large part, or the larger part, of their earthly lives in affliction.

On the Mount of Transfiguration God specially honored two men, Moses and Elijah. But Moses on earth, instead of enjoying the riches of Egypt, had to abandon it all, to live forty years as a hireling shepherd apparently poor in this world, and finally to die in the wilderness without a square foot of land to cail his own. But this experience fitted him to receive the mark of divine approval.

So with Elijah. For three years and a half he was

a fugitive from Ahab, and his daily wealth was a little meal in the barrel and a little oil in the cruse. Yet under these circumstances (as James tells us) Elijah learned to pray, and God took this poverty stricken Elijah up to heaven in a chariot of fire. The poverty was an instrument in preparing him for honor.

In that grand roll call of the heroes of faith in the eleventh of Hebrews, the majority of them were men of adversity. "Some were tortured not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword," etc.

III. Yea more. Not only did these men attain God's smile through this poverty and suffering, but they found the suffering a means of sanctification. The time when David wrote those grand Psalms, 51, and 32, and 42, the time when his spiritual nature received its greatest uplift, was the season when, as a chastisement for his sins, he was deprived of his throne and fleeing from Absalom, he was worse than poor; he was wretched. But the suffering was the means of making him "poor in spirit" and then, specially then, his "was the kingdom—the triumph—of heaven."

The same experience has been found in recent years. Some of the greatest revivals in the history of this country have been in seasons not of prosperity but of adversity. The most serious of commercial panics was in 1857; the largest number of accessions to our churches was in 1858.

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PURE FOOD LAWS.

Why not apply them to the mental food that is poured from the press? Why not pay as much attention to what the printing mills grind out as to what the factories produce?

Commercial results and money in the product determine the contents of most of the magazines and light literature of the day. Does this guarantee the best, or does it only pander to the most corrupt tastes?

The determination of the family supply of mental food is not in the hands of the State, and no laws can adequately deal with it. The young people's natural guardians, their parents, the family's natural head, the father and mother, must furnish protection here.

The State may aid, however. Pernicious books and those that have an evil trend no less than those which are openly vicious and corrupting, should be forbidden passage through the mails or sale over public counters. The paternalism implied in this need alarm no one. A little more paternalism, wisely administered, would be a good thing sometimes.

The State assumes guardianship over youth who are without parental care, to protect them in property interests. It sometimes enacts compulsory educational laws. Wherein will it be inconsistent in making provision for the protection of its future citizens from the unwholesome literature, which for the sake of gain, is circulated so freely amongst our young people? If a pure food law is not sumptuary, neither would be a law regulating the circulation of evil literature.